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THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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MANUAL TRAINING AND GOOD CITIZENSHIP

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For the use of the eighth grade of the Francis W. Parker school, in the fall of 1904, the room formerly furnished as a library was turned into a grade room. The library shelves on the south wall were boarded up to afford space for blackboards; but since there was no cupboard in which to keep materials, those covering the whole east wall were left—an unsightly length of open shelves, eight feet high. In all other respects the room is a very attractive one, with the north wall broken by three dormer windows which give a pleasing view of the park and there is a satisfactory absence of cross-light.

At the beginning of the year the pupils of the grade saw at once the admirable features of the room and its disfiguring shelves as well, and recognized the necessity of amending the appearance of the east wall. This became the problem of the class for the winter quarter in their work in art and manual training.

A few of the designs which were made and rejected are shown, to make clear the advance in taste which the children undoubtedly achieved before they found a plan which pleased them. The canons of taste which they established for themselves show constantly in their attitude toward interior decorating and their interest in it. The visible result of their work in design and execution is to be seen in the photograph of the finished work shown at the head of this article. There were other results which were also of some interest.

The class has been engaged all the year in a study of Chicago. It is possible in an eighth-grade civics class to study the problems

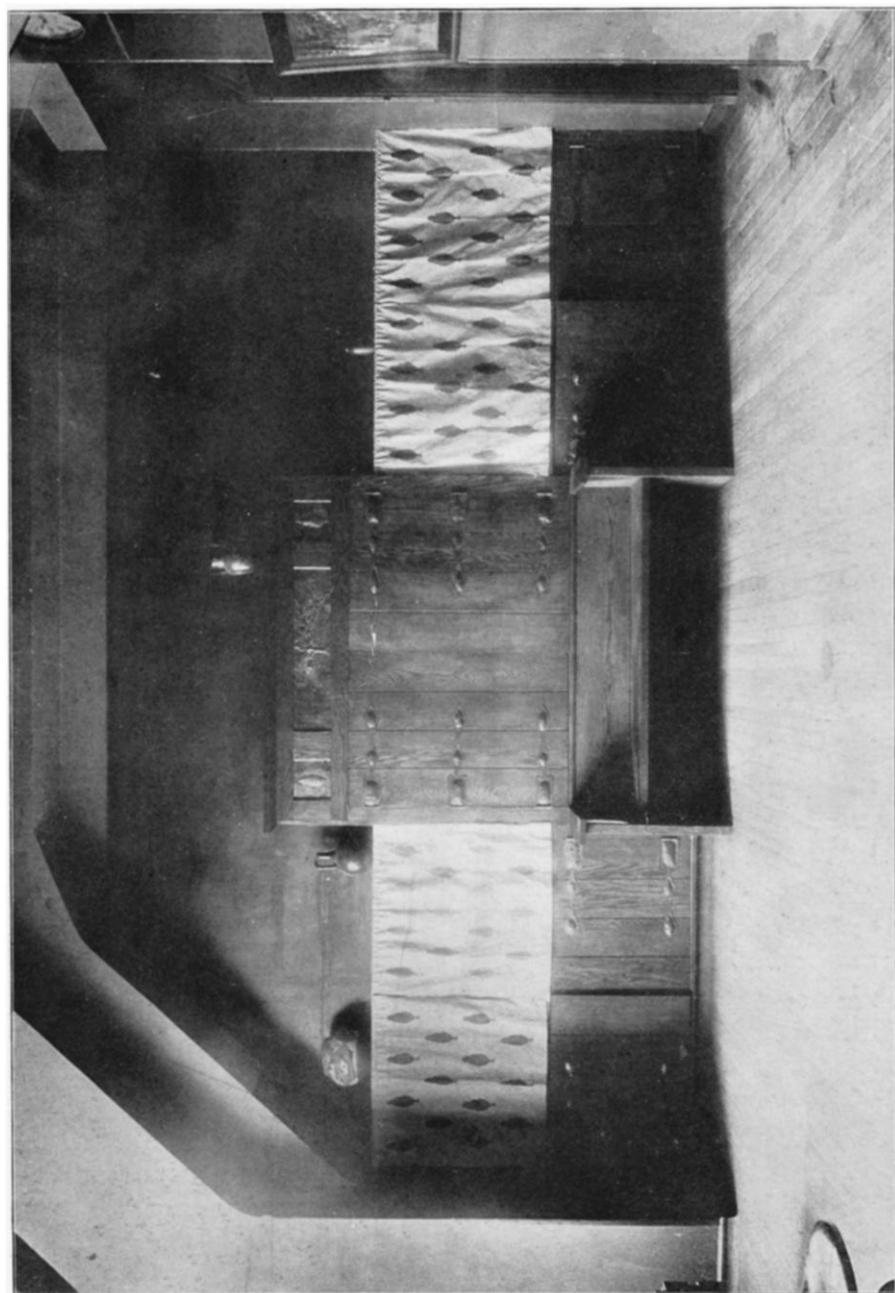


FIG. I.—The completed work. See article "Manual Training and Good Citizenship."

of a great city, and the way such a city as Chicago is trying to solve some of these problems. It is far from desirable to call the attention of such a class to the distressing aspects of municipal conditions. That is to say, it was worth while to make an excursion down the Drainage Canal, and another to the cribs; to study the history of our drainage and water-supply; to see why our problem was more difficult than that of seaboard cities; to make maps and diagrams for the use of next year's class; to see the expense attendant upon correcting our terrible mistake of draining sewage into the lake; and to find out how taxes are levied to pay this expense, and why the state government had to authorize the organization of our drainage board. But to see the opportunities for corruption which this form of organization afforded was no furtherance to the end of influencing the pupils to good citizenship.

To the lesson that good citizenship consists in actual constructive service to the community—for which lesson their year's work in civics was meant to give a background—their work in manual training in the winter quarter gave the desirable practical application. For three months they put all the skill they had into a piece of work which was not to be taken home, but to remain in the school, to be of use to all succeeding eighth grades, and a pleasure to all who should see it; and they had worked together, each doing the kind of work he best liked and could best do, and feeling responsible for the quality of his particular contribution, and all interested in the excellence of every part. And where manual training can give a class an opportunity to render a valuable service to the community, in a task which develops individual taste and ability, and engenders interest in the work of others and respect for the achievement of others, it seems to be the greatest single influence toward sympathetic, responsible, active good-citizenship.

The description which follows is intended to show how the details of the work were planned and carried out, together with something of the gain in the technique of design and wood-working which was acquired.

The pupils of the grade, after some discussion as to the best

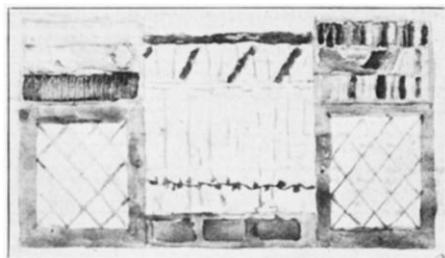


FIG. 2.—Design not accepted

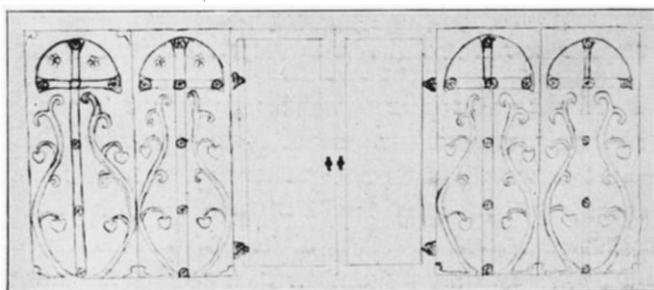


FIG. 3.—Design not accepted

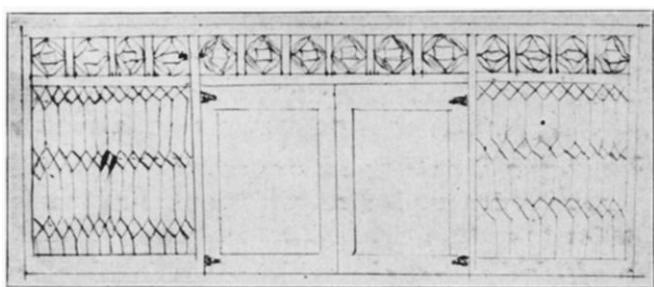


FIG. 4.—Design not accepted

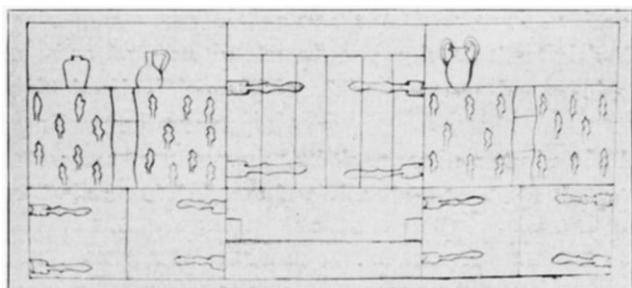


FIG. 5.—Design not accepted

general method of treating the shelves, with a view to securing both sightliness and utility, made several different plans, each child, in fact, contributing at least one. Other members of the school, both pupils and teachers, also were invited to offer suggestions, and this invitation was accepted to some extent, one grade in particular contributing a complete set of sketches.

At this point in the progress of the work, the discussions in the class were upon such questions as the best and most beautiful way to divide the space; the proportion and shape of the divisions — how much space to give to the inclosed cupboards, and how much to the curtained shelves; etc. Rough gray paper was tacked up over the shelves, and different plans were sketched out on it full size, to see how each would actually appear. Some of the suggested plans, which were most favorably considered, and the one which was finally adopted, are shown herewith.

When the arrangement of the closed cupboards and curtained shelves had been decided upon, together with the more important details of construction, such as, notably, the form of door to be used and the style of the bench, (a bench or settle for visitors, to be placed in front of the shelves, had been added to the plan as a hospitable after-thought), the children took different parts to design in detail, and assumed the responsibility for their making.

This selection was made, partly in accordance with the preference of the individual for work of a certain kind, and partly — perhaps to a greater degree — by the consensus of opinion of the grade as to the member of the class best fitted successfully to carry out a certain part of the work.

In working out the design and colors for the curtains, the children made a considerable incidental study of design. They visited Marshal Field's to look at beautifully designed curtains, and the Arts and Crafts shops to see how designs are made and put on.

In designing their own curtains, they tried borders, panel effects, and all-over patterns. After much experimental sketching of this nature, in pencil and color, full-size drawings of sketches most favorably considered were made on the blackboard.

Meanwhile much attention was devoted to the study of color

in general in the effort to select colors which would go well with those of the walls and woodwork. The north lighting, too, was necessarily taken account of in the color scheme.

The final decision was for an all-over pattern of green on tan-colored linen, using the Lombardy poplar for motif, the pattern to be put on with stencil.

In designing the hinge-plates, much the same methods were employed. Some of the children visited the Newberry Library to see designs of hinges, and many drawings were made, and full-size paper patterns cut out, before anything which at all satisfied the class was produced. When the form was finally agreed upon (see Fig. 9), a stiff pattern was carefully made, and the hinge-plates were marked by it upon sheet copper of medium weight. They were then cut out and raised in the center by hammering into a wooden mold made for the purpose.

A number of the members of the class were somewhat dissatisfied with the use of hinge-plates merely for decoration, but as true hinges of decorative type have had to be forged in iron, for which work none of the pupils was prepared, it was decided to use the plates, temporarily at least, as the general style of the doors demanded something of the sort.

For a time the class was anxious to have the space above the large doors of the center cupboard finished in leaded glass, but finally the suggestion was made that it should be finished with copper panels, set into an oak frame, the panels to be decorated in a way to carry out the scheme of decoration used on the curtains. This idea was adopted, and one boy was given charge of that work. The tree designs were carefully drawn on the face side of the copper and outlined with a chasing tool; then the design was raised up from the back, the copper sheet being supported on soft wood, which furnished a sufficiently yielding surface into which to beat the design.

In the woodwork the chief difficulties were encountered in making the long joints required in the doors and bench. As some of these were four feet or more in length, and the wood used was oak, a great deal of care and patience was demanded, and a good degree of skill in accurate planing was developed.

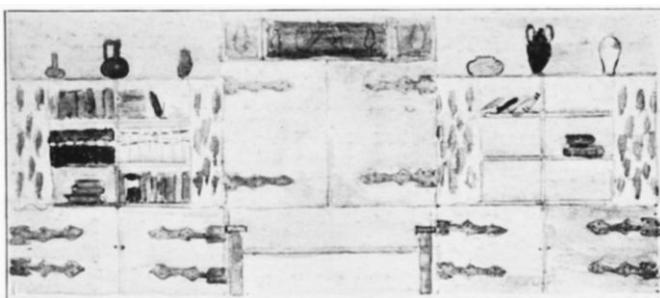


FIG. 6—Accepted design

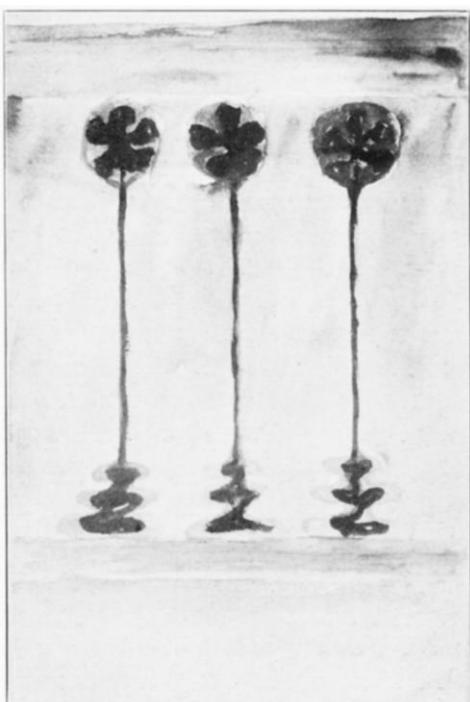


FIG. 7.—Design for curtain not accepted

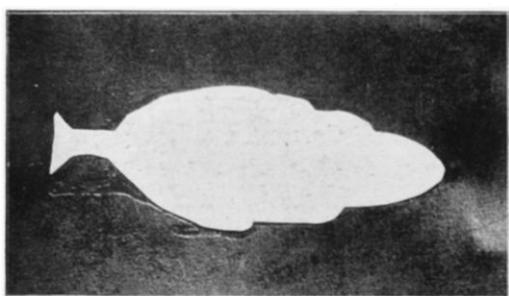


FIG. 8.—Stencil used in decorating curtain

FIG. 9.—
Design used
for copper
hinge

Each joint was amply doweled to insure permanence and rigidity, and cleats were screwed across the inside of the doors to keep them flat.

The children also had considerable trouble in fitting the hinges and hanging the doors so that they would swing properly. Although both the operations were tolerably familiar to them in previous pieces of work, the size and weight of the work added greatly to its difficulty.

In looking over the results of the work, it would seem that the greatest gain, from the technical point of view, in the wood working, was in the handling of larger pieces, the making of the long joints, the setting up and plumbing of the door frames, and the squaring and hanging of the comparatively large and heavy doors, all of which, though really repetitions of operations with which the pupils were familiar appeared, in this larger piece of work, in the nature of new undertakings.

In design, the greatest value of the work was in the incentive it furnished to the children to find out the laws and principles governing good design. The pupils saw that in making their own designs they arrived at pleasing results only after a great deal of experimenting, and that with no certain knowledge to guide them. Even when one of the class chanced upon something which he liked, it was often discovered, upon critical examination, to possess faults and weaknesses which easily might have been avoided, had he possessed some knowledge of the fundamental principles underlying all good design.

The organization of the work, as effected by the children, in a very informal and almost unconscious manner, was very interesting. The interest of the grade as a whole was so thoroughly enlisted in the undertaking that no child thought of not contributing. The natural leaders gradually assumed direction of the work, and carried the responsibility of it, while the less capable members of the group were aroused to their greatest effort.

In a word, the work was great enough, and inspiring enough, from the children's point of view, to incite each member of the class to the highest quality of thought and action.